

THE CRITIC.

BY GEOFFREY JUVENAL, ESQ.

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“sine nervis altera quicquid
“Composui, pars esse putat, similesque meorum
“Mille die versus deduci posse.” Hor.

April 26th, 1820.

Mr. CRITIC,

OLD, and experienced, and judicious, as you represented yourself to your readers, an inconsistency is manifest in your public conduct, for which even you can scarcely allege a tolerable excuse. When you appeared before the world in *pontificalibus*, and pronounced your elaborate inaugural address, your declared intention was to atone for a life of listless indolence, by zealous efforts for the general good—to exercise a firm and impartial censorship over morals and manners—and to banish or correct those follies and offences which are beneath the notice, or beyond the solemn reproofs of the pulpit, the lofty eloquence of the gazettes, or the usual

operation of the laws. Like other great men on their induction into office, you have sketched a course of honourable and dignified proceeding, and loudly proclaimed your inviolable adherence to such principles. Fearless, equal, general criticism was your promise. But no sooner have you collected an attentive audience, or, in less figurative language, have you secured a host of purchasers for your lucubrations, than you turn short off, and sicken us with *reviewing*, and analysing, and describing, not manners, but *books*; and books, too, that are too silly and contemptible to be even ludicrous. If it was your determination to employ your latter days in this common-place occupation of froward schoolboys and literary outcasts, you might have secured a corner in some of the ten thousand magazines that load our press and wrap up our cakes. There you might have indulged your propensity for literary criticism, and, at the same time, received your reward—been well paid and never read. But we were led to expect, within the small compass of your sheet, an amusing and instructive essay upon popular subjects of the day—a good-humoured chronicle of the minor transactions of the fashionable world—a mirror, whose magic powers might not only reflect the present aspect of our society, but mark out its path, and accelerate its progress to a higher state of refinement. To what purpose now, do you, Mr. Geoffrey, encroach upon the functions of

learned theologians, in long prosing harangues upon abstract duties, or crowd your little leaves with attacks and reviews of such "small deer" as the Backwoodsman, or the moon-struck rhymesters of England, or their crazy puffers of Edinburg, who prate and chatter in a gibberish more unmeaning than the late debates at Harrisburg? Permit me to inform you, that the Dictatorship you arrogate would be more faithfully exercised, and your speculations become far more edifying, if you would devote a little time to the censure or ridicule of the troublesome follies with which we are pestered in every-day life.—Could you not, for instance, favour us ladies with some remarks, in your facetious manner, explanatory and corroborative of my lord Monboddo's system—or give us a zoological detailed account of the present race of shod, belted, frocked, choaked Dandies, to whom his lordship's accurate heraldry has assigned so humble a parentage? Have your recollections of early life, or your knowledge of existing customs, furnished you with no objects of reproach, in the assemblies of the fashionable, but their paltry jargon? Does the ruinous extravagance of modern times, and the childish rage for mimicking, with Chinese accuracy, the very defects and vices of foreign manners, never excite the spleen of a Critic so much inclined to eulogize ancient purity and simplicity? But if your venerable gravity cannot often descend to sport and pleasantry,

will not the lamentable condition and unhappy pursuits of the hopes of their country—your youthful fellow-citizens, call forth one paternal admonition? The downward tendency of their present habits of slothful indulgence might, at least, be pointed out, and mayhap your logic would convince a few of the truth of the maxim, that,

“Aucun chemin de fleurs, ne conduit à la gloire.”

In one word, Mr. Juvenal, I and several of my friends have been watching, day after day, for something in your numbers beside reviews of miserable poems, and have come to the conclusion that, notwithstanding all your boasting, you grow rather stupid.—Unless, therefore, you speedily present us with somewhat more amusing, I fear you will lose the patronage of your friend,

ABIGAIL BRIAR.

The preceding epistle, though not marked by the courtesy I should expect from all, but more especially from my fair, correspondents, contains, it must be confessed, some home truths. For many years, books, and not men, have been my constant associates; and as one invariably acquires the habits of his familiar companions, I may have learned to attach an undue importance to this my chosen society. I did not enough consider, perhaps, that multitudes of my readers, and those too, for whom I entertain a high respect, pass their

lives, conduct momentous business, and acquire and transmit much valuable knowledge, principally by means of oral communication. To them books, and all which they inherit, are at best but "formal dulness;" literature has no charms; and speculations upon its excellencies or defects are, consequently, tiresome and fruitless.—Viewing the matter in this light, and disposed, in a certain degree, to convince my plain-spoken subscriber of my willingness to be corrected, I had determined instantly to select one of the topics suggested for a lucubration, when the following letter made its appearance. To the author of it, I tender my sincere thanks, and beg the favour that his correspondence may be continued.

TO THE CRITIC.

MR. JUVENAL,

Experience, a severe but efficient teacher, has at last convinced our fellow-citizens, that they and their country have grown and lived too fast. An extended and lucrative, but temporary commerce, introduced sudden wealth, and enabled the fortunate to accumulate immense fortunes in a short time. The general spirit of extravagance, and lavish expenditure, produced by this influx of riches, for some years pervaded every branch, and infected every class of society. But a nipping

frost has touched this premature bloom. The fond hopes of an interminable harvest are withered. Stern necessity now drives the cultivator to renew his labours, and the niggardly product is hoarded with rigid economy, in dreadful anticipation of a total dearth.—Retrenchment is the order of the day—every unnecessary disbursement is avoided; and we find, that although we must no longer build palaces, decorate princely villas, or display regal magnificence in our entertainments, we can yet live contented in humbler dwellings—that the simplicity of rural life has its charms; and that the duties of hospitality may be acceptably performed without the gorgeous display of gold and silver, and “barbaric pomp.” We have arrived at these sound conclusions of practical philosophy by the unwelcome process of inflicted remedies, and yet are now well inclined to claim the merit of a voluntary reformation. You undoubtedly remember, Sir, the time when a political party rode into power over the heads of their opponents, by joining in the clamour against the policy of their mode of government, and have since seen, as I have, that same triumphant party practically adopting the whole system which they had reprobated, and now actually deriving all their popularity from the successful prosecution of that very policy which they so fervently denounced. The case of our reformation, per force, in manners, appears to

me nearly parallel. We have had before our eyes, for more than a century, a People whose habits and modes of life, formed upon reflection, and continued in the face of ridicule and scoffing—are precisely those which we are now willing, and even anxious to adopt and defend as the only rational system.—My attention has been called to this comparison by the recent assembly of that sect in this city, for I am not a member, nor can I agree with that Society in some of their peculiar tenets. But the whole economy of their system is irresistably attractive to a philosophic mind. In an age when luxury, and vice, and shameless extravagance, under the peculiar patronage of the Monarch, was overwhelming the kingdom, they heroically separated themselves from the unthinking herd, and, with undeviating perseverance, pursued their system of reform in spite of derision, of scorn, and of oppression. Returning to the simplicity of early times, their costume, mansions, tables, and intercourse, were all wisely limited to the attainment of perfect comfort, but to the exclusion of splendid display or ceremonious formality. When it became expedient for some of them to emigrate, these valuable rules of conduct accompanied them across the ocean, and the new world is indebted to their prudent policy and liberal views, for the fairest city that now decorates this empire. To describe their Society, as it has existed here,